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# THE NESTORIAN RITUAL OF THE WASHING OF THE DEAD.

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One of the manuscripts recently acquired by the Union Theological Seminary in New York, consists of "The Service of Obsequies;" or, as stated in the colophon, "The Order of the Obsequies of Every Class, Men, Women, Youths, and All Ages and All Conditions." It treats of each class separately, giving rituals and rubrics, sometimes merely referring to other books for the words of a Scripture passage, a dirge, a response, etc., and sometimes giving them at length. The manuscript is on paper, 148 leaves (296 pages), in *quiniones*, bound in heavy boards covered with leather, but now somewhat dilapidated. Size of book, 9 x 7 x 2½ inches; of written page, 6 x 4½ inches; about 19 lines to the page, running clear across, or in only one column. It is written in a beautiful Nestorian script, pretty fully pointed, with abundant rubrication, and somewhat ornamented here and there. The book was finished, as the colophon says, in the year of the Greeks 2046, on the 5th day of the month of Ab, on the 4th Tuesday of Summer; which corresponds to Tuesday, August 5th, A. D. 1735. It was written in Targawar, in the village of Darband, by Priest Warda, son of the late Lazarus, one of the sons of Mar John, bishop of Adorbigan.

At the beginning of the book is the "Ritual (or Custom) of the Washing of the Departed," which has proved so interesting to those who have heard it translated, that it seems proper to send a copy of the text and a translation to HERBICA. In copying the text, most of the points are omitted, since the matter is clear enough without them. The following is the text. It occupies a few lines over three pages of the manuscript.

صیور بئنا دلا مانی . مصلی مده بخلد / مصلی / بختی / مصلی . شمنی اقسام  
و من و خن و خن و خن . مصلی و خن و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی و مصلی  
ظای / و خن . و مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی  
مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی و مصلی  
و مصلی : و مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی . و مصلی و مصلی





who is washing him rubs his garment upon his body on all sides, until the water [runs off] very clear. Next they wash his feet downward from his knees. Then those who are present go out, and a familiar friend [*lit.*, and he who has boldness toward him] remains with him in his place, and, after his fellows have gone out, strips him of his clothing, and dresses him in other clothing. But it is not right for him to bring in a cross with him, not at all, by any means; that he may not follow the fashion of those who covered up our Lord's cross [i. e., the worldly hypocrites].

"And know this, too, that in the rank in which he used to go to the altar while living, in that [rank] they shall let him enter the grave. If he were a monk, without grade to go in to the altar, according to the rank of his monkhood let them thus bring him in. But if he be one out of many, a light, according as he used to stand in the service of the church, let them thus bring him to the grave.

"And while they are washing the departed, whoever he may be, they say over him the *mauthbhê* (i. e., *kathisma*) of the washing, performing it in the house of the departed, or upon the roofs, or if they have no place, in the church; according as it is written in the Order of the Departed.

"And when they carry him out, they begin the *qalê* of the way, and let his head be foremost, as it were leaving peace to the household. And when they go out from the village, they put the bier in a pure place, and they perform fully three '*ûnîn*. Then they take him up and bear him, with *qalê* and *shûchlâphê*, and the priests and the people preceding him, until they come beside the grave.

"And when they begin the *qala* of the approach, *Maran athâ*, they make the bier pass first, and the priests and people after the bier, until they come to the grave. And they lay the departed on the right hand side of the grave, the priests remaining at his feet with their faces toward the grave.

"And when they have finished from the *paşôqâ* three '*ûnîn*, they lower the departed into the grave. And when the *paşôqâ* is ended, the priest throws a little dust in the grave, but not in the form of a cross, as foolish people do; and they bury completely the dead. And pray [ye] for the sinner."

Respecting the technical terms which I have not translated above, the *mauthbhê*, "sessions," "seats," is equivalent to the Greek *kathisma*, meaning originally that part of the service during which the people sat. The *qala*, "voice," and the *shûchlâpha*, "variation," are respectively the prayer or hymn, generally the latter, and the sentiment used in connection or in alternation with it; or, perhaps "chant" is a better rendering for both. The "*qala of the way*" is, in effect, a processional chant. The '*ûnaiâ* (plural in this MS., '*ûnain*) is an anthem with responses, or antiphonal. The *paşôqâ* appears to be the "conclusion;" varying greatly for different classes of people, and comprehending several divisions which bear some of the names above given,

along with others. These technical terms would be better understood if there were space enough to introduce a few samples.

The text above given is repeated piecemeal, in the shape of rubrics, at the appropriate places in the manuscript, except that which relates strictly to the washing, which occurs nowhere else in the book.

The ritual for the burial of *priests* was translated into English, and published by the Rev. George Percy Badger, in his "The Nestorians and their Rituals." In another connection he mentions the fact that directions for the washing are given ; but does not translate them.